Committee: Legal Committee

Topic A: The Military Use of Children

Country: Hungary

School: American International School of Kingston

Throughout history, children have served as soldiers in armed forces. These children, some as young as the age of six, are forced to become a member of an armed force controlled by a government, political group, or rebel group, in a conflicted area. Some of these minors must participate in combat, laying explosives, and fighting on the front lines, whilst others work behind the scenes, delivering messages and acting as decoys. Some are spies and human shields, while others are domestic laborers and sexual slaves. Everyday these children are forced to live in the most deplorable of conditions, without basic needs such as food, medical care, and education. United Nations Children’s Fund Executive Director Carol Bellamy has reported that 540 million children, or one in four children in the world, live in military violence or are displaced from their homes. Until the root causes of turmoil and armed conflict in nations where the military use of children remains rampant are addressed, the problem of child soldiers is liable to persist and even expand. The Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG) was first established on December 12, 1996, as a United Nations General Assembly Resolution 51/77. SRSG serves as an independent campaign for the protection and well being of children affected by armed conflict. In 2002 the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (Optional Protocol) was created, and is still the most comprehensive of international treaties relating to child soldiers. Its primary aim is to ensure that children are protected from the possibility of involvement in armed conflicts by rising the minimum age for using children in conflicts to 18, and prohibiting compulsory recruitment by governments and non-state groups. At a ministerial meeting in Paris, February 2007, Hungary and 58 other states authorized the Paris Commitments to protect children from illegal recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and the Paris Principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups. The documents reaffirmed international standards and operational principles for protecting and assisting child soldiers and followed a wide-ranging global consultation jointly sponsored by the French government and UNICEF. The Hungarian Defense Force voluntary age of military service is eighteen to twenty five years of age with no conscription and a six-month obligation. Although, the ‘universal enrollment’ for men actually starts at the age of seventeen because volunteers have to register with the authorities by January first, the year they turn eighteen. The legal basis for conscription is the 1993 statute on Home Defense, as amended “Conscription obligation starts at the completion of age 17 and ends on December 31 of the year the conscript turns 50” (Article 69) Hungary’s policy for the use of child soldiers follows the previously mentioned treaties and resolutions passed by the United Nations, especially Optional Protocol, maintaining a role in the prevention of using children for military gain. Hungary believes that two possible solutions to reach the goal of abolishing the military use of children are to educate individuals on the problem and to limit the distribution of weapons. Hungary thinks that educating individuals will make those people more aware of the problem many children face, and then spread their new knowledge to others around them. The limitation on the distribution of weapons will help prevent armaments from being sold to minors and restrict the amount of weapons being sold to warlords.